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AUTHOR Breen, Myles P.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to explore the way network television news observes three countries friendly to the United States: Australia, Canada, and Japan. Every news story from 1968 to 1983 on the ABC, CBS, and NBC networks that mentioned any of the three countries or their people was examined. Coders classified the 4,038 stories based on origin, date, length, network broadcast technique, and topic category. The most significant finding of the study was that none of the countries was particularly newsworthy. Most of the stories originated in the United States. The Canadian and Japanese stories tended to concern legal and political or business and economic matters, insofar as these impinged on American interests. Canadian stories were often concerned with the Canadian environment, but seldom with Canadian sports. Stories were unusually interested in Australian sports and environment. In general, the news reports tended to ignore art, music, show business, and religion, particularly in Canada. (HTH)

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A STUDY OF HOW AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND JAPAN ARE PERCEIVED ON UNITED STATES TELEVISION NETWORK NEWS.

A paper presented at the International Communications Association's Annual Convention.

Honolulu, Hawaii. May, 1985

Myles P. Breen

Mitchell College

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A STUDY OF HOW AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND JAPAN ARE PERCEIVED ON UNITED STATES TELEVISION NETWORK NEWS.

OVERVIEW.

This study was designed to provide an accurate and objective view of the way the network television news observes three friendly foreign countries: Australia, Canada and Japan. Because the American public obtains much of its information and shapes its opinion from television newscasts (Adams, 1978; Zucker, 1978), the analysis of the newscasts is a logical first step in understanding the perceptions of Americans towards these countries, and the nature of the relationship between them and the United States.

Evidence from pollsters provide additional evidence for the importance of television news. Roper (1983) reported that 65% of the American public indicated they received most of their news via television. Perhaps even more importantly, Roper's respondents indicated increasing levels of credibility in television as opposed to newspapers, radio, and magazines with each successive survey. Television is looked upon as the most credible medium by a margin of 2.5 to 1 over its closest rival, the newspaper.

It is reasonable to expect then that this high credibilty affects public opinion and, in fact, Zucker has demonstrated that network television news has influenced national public opinion about certain issues such as pollution, drug abuse, energy, cost of living, unemployment, and crime. It is not difficult to extrapolate from these topics to the public's perception of personalities and countries. It is important, therefore, to examine television news coverage of a topic or a country to explain and anticipate public opinion about that topic or country.

The presentation of the image of a country on television news is, by the nature of the medium, fragmentary and diffuse. The style of short stories, usually ranging in length from ten seconds to a minute, and averaging thirty seconds or so, demands that, to obtain a coherent picture, a large number of stories over a considerable time must be collected and analyzed.

Glen Fisher in his book, American Communication in a Global Society, (1979), has pointed out that, regarding world affairs, the American public is relatively ill-informed and ethnocentric compared with the publics of many other advanced countries. Although in recent years the Public Broadcasting System may have a significant source for the élites, most people in the United States get most of their news from the three commercial networks. While U.S. government policy makers may be better informed than the public at large, the policy makers are

inevitably influenced by the opinion of the public which is, in turn, influenced by television news. Thus, what is on these commercial networks has become worthy of intensive study for any party interested in the formation of American public opinion. While polls and surveys can elicit responses from publics, the content analysis of the newscasts allows a picture of the agendas to which the publics have been exposed, and hence have a prior importance in determining the questions that the pollsters should ask.

Therefore the perceptions in the minds of the populace are important regardless of the reality behind those perceptions, and so as to ascertain how Australia, Canada and Japan and their people were perceived by the commercial TV networks in the United States, an empirically based factual analysis of the extant videotape recordings of the commercial television networks was undertaken.

PROCEDURE.

Every news story from 1968 to 1983 on the three networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, which mentioned any of the three countries or their people was examined. Vanderbilt University's Television News Index and Abstracts was used to find the relevant articles. Following Larson (1979, p. 136), any news story that mentioned the country, regardless of its thematic content or dateline, was considered an Australian, Canadian or Japanese story and was duly

counted. Because the Inlevision News Index and Abstracts are organized by topic and personality rather than locality, other entries besides "Australia," "Canada" and "Japan" were routinely scanned. Entries such as, "Adelaide, Brisbane, Fraser, Hawke, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Whitlam" for Australia were regularly scanned. Similarly, for Canada, "British Columbia, Calgary, Labrador, Magdalen Island, Manitoba, Montreal, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Ottawa, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Toronto, Trudeau (Margaret and Pierre), Vancouver and Windsor" were scanned as well as names which were pertinent for each relevant time period. For Japan, the scrutinized entries included: "Datsun, Fukuda, Hirohito, Hiroshima, Honda, Miki, Nihon (University), Nissan, Ohira, Okamoto, Ono, Sato, Sony, Suzuki, Tanaka, Tokyo, and Toyota."

After all the stories were located the coders proceeded to classify the stories based on the following descriptors: origin; month; day; year; page of catalog; length of story (seconds); network, whether the story was reported in the studio, on film, on remote, or two or more of these techniques; and category of story.

Origin was coded in four possible ways: (1) United States; (2) Australia/Canada/Japan; (3) any country other than the United States and the country in question; (4) more than one origin. All studio-only stories were coded United States. However, if a story included only a brief studio introduction prior to a film

report from the foreign country, the story was coded for that country. If a story involved more than one country it was considered to have more than one origin; for example, a story about the Canadian auto industry might first discuss the effect of a Canadian strike on American workers in the studio portion, followed by a film from a Canadian auto plant.

When the story was clearly about Australia, Canada, or Japan or if one of these countries was integral to the story, the entire time was used. However, if it was only briefly mentioned in a phrase, for example "a Canadian storm," and was clearly not integral to the story, the story was assigned five seconds. If the country was mentioned in a complete sentence, but was not integral to the main story, for example "Toronto is one of the most attractive modern cities in the world," in a story on cities in the world, the story was assigned ten seconds.

The archives began collecting the off-the-air recordings of the evening network news in July 1968. The stories, however, were not timed and only counter numbers were given. Attempts were made to correlate counter numbers of the catalogued stories with the times of a sample of videotaped stories, but after consultation with the Vanderbilt Archive personnel, these attempts were abandoned. Thus no duration for the stories was available until the advent of accurate timing in 1971.

When coding the technique of presentation, a story was

considered studio only when no film or tape was used in conjunction with the story. The story was considered film/tape only if there was no studio portion, or if the studio portion was simply an introduction to the film. The story was classified remote when it originated live from that site, as for example, when the Economic Summit Conference was held in Bonn, West Germany.

The eleven categories used to code the stories were: legal and political; economy and business; environment; art and music; crime; religion; sport; science and education; human interest; sensation; and other. Legal and political included any stories that focused on such things as international laws or agreements, trials, government, protests, and war. Economy and business included stories on such topics as trade, marketing, monetary policies, corporations and small businesses. Environment and disaster included all natural disasters, pollution, and transportation disasters. Art, music, and show business included all cultural activities such as literature, television, or film. Crime included all stories involving arrests, obvious illegal activity and the police; demonstrations were included only if an illegal act was committed. Religion included stories on religious leaders and practices. Sport was not limited to athletic activities, it included all sorts of international competition and American sport. Science and education included research, honorary degrees, schools, medicine and health. Human

interest included obituaries, society, and stories that focused on interesting individuals or groups. Sensation included unusual or bizarre stories, such as sightings of the Loch Ness monster. "Other" was a category devised for the very few stories that could not suitably be put into any of the above mentioned categories.

When one subject was clearly dominant, no secondary topic was coded. However, in stories where no subject was dominant, two or more categories were coded. For example, a story that reported both a Canadian tanker oil spill and the high price of Canadian oil could be coded both economy and business and environment and disaster.

RELIABILITY. The establishment of reliable categories in this type of content analysis has been a traditional stumbling block (Deutschmann, 1959; Masterton, 1977). Because a news story can be classified in several areas simultaneously (for example, in Legal/Political or Business/Economics), the standard mutual exclusivity in establishing categories is not, in network news analysis, a useful indicant of reliability. The coders must agree, however, a sufficiently high percentage of the time, on the categories in which the stories are to be included. In broad terms, while 60% of the news stories may fall within a single category, 30% may fall in two categories, 5% in three and so forth. Agreement among coders of this distribution is what constitutes reliability, and 80% agreement is sufficient for

valid and informative analysis. The principal investigator was the main coder and trained twelve other coders to establish a reliable procedure in coding the entire universe of the catalogued stories.

The coders were given a set of guidelines for coding. These guidelines served to further define and clarify several of the content categories. Reliability of the coders was assessed for randomly selected sets of stories. The total sample of stories for this reliability check was seventeen for the Australian data, thirty-five for the Canadian, and sixty-six for the Japanese. Each set was rated by five coders at a time on the eleven category system. The formula utilized for the reliability check was that developed by Robinson and advanced by Robert North and Ole Holsti (in Robinson, 1963, p. 49). These procedures yielded a reliability coefficient of R=.88 for the Australian material, .97 for the Canadian and .94 for the Japanese. This exceeded the preset target of R=.80. As a result, intercoder reliability was deemed acceptable and the ratings of individual coders were presumed to be sufficient for the remaining stories.

A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS.

The most significant finding of the study is that none of the countries are particularly newsworthy. As Table 1 shows, there were 4,038 stories identified for the period 1968 to 1983, giving an average of about 251 stories a year.

TABLE ONE.

NUMBER OF STORIES PER YEAR. *

	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	JAPAN
1968	3	14	27
1969	53	55	109
1970	17	80	69
1971	27	146	180
1972	17	109	157
1973	10	108	135
1974	37	77	130
1975	28	72	84
1976	10	73	135
1977	23	105	143
1978	9	113	202
1979	19	79	118
1980	41	126	195
1981	13	140	124
1982	9	79	139
1983	66	54	211
TOTAL	382	1430	2218

* In 1968, there were only six months available to study.

Put another way, if one watched all three commercial TV network news programs in the United States all the time, one would expect to view a news story which mentioned Australia, or someone or something identifiably Australian, once every ten days. A Canadian mention would emerge on average every three days, and one network would mention something Japanese almost every day. That is, one would have to watch four and a half hours of the nightly news programs which include commercials, to obtain a thirty second Canadian story. (The average length for a Canadian story over the period of the study was, in fact, thirty-one seconds). One might also remember that the mere mention of the word Canada or Canadian

or identifiably Canadian entity (e.g. Toronto, or Trudeau) caused the story to be included in the universe of stories from all three networks, so this definition is the most generous possible for including a story to be called Canadian, and similarly for the Australian and Japanese stories.

When one compares the 1968-1983 data on the three countries, the profile of the TV news stories for Canada is roughly consistent with the profile which emerged from former studies on Australia (Breen, 1982) and Japan (Breen, 1984). This study, which dealt with a longer span of time, provided further evidence for the tendencies formerly identified. Like the Japanese stories, the Canadian stories tended to concern legal and political or business and economic matters. Like the Australian story profile, when Canada was under the editorial news scrutiny, the environment seemed important for the American audience in the news editors' collective opinion. Perhaps surprisingly, because Canada shares the North American sports scene with the United States with hockey, football, basketball and other sports in common, the Canadian sports scene is closer to the Japanese profile than the Australian. Only 5.5% of the Canadian stories concerned sports, and his is closer to the 1.3% afforded the Japanese story profile than the 18.2% afforded the Australian. Table 2 shows the topics of the news stories about Canada.

TABLE TWO

TOPICS OF TV STORIES
ABOUT AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND JAPAN.

[Arranged in approximately descending order].

	AUSTRALIA		CANADA		JAPAN	
Topic of News story	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Legal & Political	173	32.2	831	45.8	1686	49.5
Business & Economics	45	8.4	343	18.9	954	28.0
Environment [incl. disasters]	94	17.5	221	12.2	245	7.2
Crime	28	5.2	190	10.5	263	7.7
Sport	98	18.2	99	5.5	44	1.3
Human Interest	22	4.1	60	3.3	76	2.2
Science & Education [Health]	30	5.6	42	2.3	57	1.7
Art, Music [incl. culture]	14	2.6	13	.7	52	1.5
Sensational stories	24	4.5	5	.3	9	.3
Religion	9	1.7	4	.2	16	.5
Other [not in classes above]	0	0	7	.4	3	.1
TOTAL *	537	100.0	1815	100.0	3405	100.0

* NOTE. Multiple Classification Possible. A news story could be classified under multiple headings, for example, it could be both political and economic (see text page 7). Of the 4030 stories classified, 1729 or 43% were given multiple responses making a total of 5757 different classifications.

Inspection of the data regarding the different networks or the origins of the stories did not suggest any particular pattern. Australian stories were fairly evenly divided between the three networks. Over the sixteen year period ABC had 32.5%, CBS 35.9% and NBC 31.7% of the stories. The pattern is similar for Japanese stories with 32.2% for ABC, 31.2% for CBS and 36.9% for NBC. The

Canadian story pattern was slightly different with ABC showing less interest in Canada than the other two networks: ABC 26.6%, CBS 37.9% and NBC 35.5%. One might speculate that ABC news, which over the years has striven for a snappier image than its competitors, has found the Canadian scene rather dull.

Regarding the origin of the stories, most originated in the United States: 82.5% of the Australian, and 61.2% and 65.3% of the Canadian and Japanese stories respectively. As far as Canada is concerned, one could argue that because of the large number of American-originated stories, the networks do not have a North American perspective in toto, but rather a national one. On the other hand, one could argue that it is in the nature of news for studio-originated stories to be more prevalent as it is cheaper and simpler for an anchor to read copy that has come from a news wire. For example, when the twenty-two per cent of the stories exclusively from Canada are added to the thirteen per cent from both Canada and the United States, they provide a respectable number of stories (36% with rounding errors) from Canada, and consequently the opposite conclusion can be drawn. Essentially, this question seems to be one of whether the glass is half empty or half full.

It is clear, however, that about a third of the Australian, and about a half of all Canadian and Japanese stories concern politics. Less than a quarter of the Canadian, and less than a third of the Japanese, and less than one tenth of the Australian

concern business and economics. Seventeen per cent of the Australian, twelve per cent of the Canadian and seven per cent of the Japanese stories chosen by the American TV news editors concerned the environment and many of these are disaster stories such as airplane crashes. (See Table Two).

Crime stories are, of course, perennial. The Canadian average of one story in ten is consistent with the ten to twelve per cent range for the Japanese and Australian samples. Clearly, the crime story is an artifact of the news-gathering process, and this study, then, supports the hypothesis (Robinson, 1978) that the editors sprinkle a mixture of ingredients to make up a news show, and crime, like salt or sugar in cooking, seems to be a consistent ingredient in the mixture. (Although it may seem irrelevant to a discussion of news as such, it does seem worth noting that the consistent percentage of crime stories does not correlate with the actual crime rates in the countries concerned. The Japanese have most cause for complaint about falsification of their image here, as they have the lowest crime rate of the countries in these studies!).

Japanese and Canadian science, education, health and medicine appeared in about two per cent of all the stories which mentioned those countries in the nightly television network news. While Japanese art, music, show business and religion collectively added up to about 2% of the Japanese stories, the art, music, show business, culture and religion of the Canadians did not reach a

percentage point of all the stories on Canada. The numbers for the Australian stories in those categories were actually higher than those for the Canadian, but with such low numbers, all one can say is that stories in these categories are remarkable for their absence. Nearly all the stories on Australian religion, for example, concerned the Pope's visit in the seventies.

In summary, the American editors took note of foreign politics and business (especially Japanese), at least in so far as it impinged on American interests. They kept a wary eye out for the environment of their Northern neighbor, yet were relatively unimpressed with the Canadian sports scene. They were unusually interested in Australian sports and environment. They also tended to ignore art, music, show business and religion, especially if it was Canadian!

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